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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MINSK 000187

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [BO](#)

SUBJECT: KOZULIN'S LAWYER TALKS POLITICS, SHOWS IMPRESSIVE
VISION

REF: A. 06 MINSK 731

[1](#)B. MINSK 003

[1](#)C. MINSK 177

[1](#)D. 06 MINSK 1278

[1](#)E. 06 MINSK 1301

Classified By: Ambassador Karen Stewart for reason 1.4 (d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) On March 1, Ambassador met with former opposition presidential candidate Aleksandr Kozulin's attorney, Igor Rynkevich, as an act of moral support following politically motivated threats against Rynkevich's law license and person.

Rynkevich, himself a member of Kozulin's party, confirmed that Kozulin supports the upcoming congress of Belarusian pro-democracy forces to draft a common opposition plan for democratizing Belarus. Moreover, he supports Aleksandr Milinkevich's participation in that congress but criticizes his non-partisan civil society movement. In other comments, Rynkevich demonstrated far greater balance and insight into the state of the opposition and Belarus' European prospects than we are used to hearing. End summary.

GOB Pressure on Kozulin's Lawyer

[1](#)2. (C) On March 1, Ambassador met with Igor Rynkevich, the lawyer for imprisoned opposition leader Aleksandr Kozulin, to offer him moral support after the Minsk Regional Bar Association issued him a politically motivated disciplinary warning for alleged "violations of labor discipline" and several GOB threats to revoke his law license. Rynkevich was Kozulin's principal defense counsel during his July 2006 trial on politically motivated charges of "hooliganism" and disturbing the peace (ref A). Despite a February 16 decision by prison authorities to bar Rynkevich from visiting Kozulin, Rynkevich later met with Kozulin and shared much of their conversation on issues of Belarusian opposition politics with Ambassador.

Kozulin Seeks Milinkevich's Participation in the Congress

[1](#)3. (C) Rynkevich confirmed for Ambassador that Kozulin supports holding a democratic congress (preferably before the April 26 Chernobyl demonstration) and encouraging opposition coalition de facto leader Aleksandr Milinkevich's participation. Noting Belarusian Popular Front (BPF) Chair Vintsuk Vyachorka's recent efforts to secure Milinkevich's participation in the congress, Ambassador asked Rynkevich whether Kozulin would support the BPF leader's proposal to

elect Milinkevich as president of the coalition's Political Council and create an executive council with rotational leadership composed of other democratic coalition representatives. Rynkevich responded affirmatively and recalled how he recently communicated to Milinkevich a similar suggestion from Kozulin. Rynkevich stressed that Kozulin regards Milinkevich as deserving special leadership status. Nevertheless, Kozulin insists that Belarus' pro-democracy parties should convene a congress of opposition forces with or without Milinkevich's participation.

Kozulin on the Purposes of an Opposition Congress

14. (C) Kozulin believes that the principal purposes of such a congress should be a common opposition declaration on the illegitimacy of Lukashenko's presidency and the drafting of a short common opposition plan, or "Little Constitution," for the transformation of Belarus from a totalitarian state to a liberal democracy. The little constitution would be a legal framework for the coalition's eventual election of an opposition shadow government that would seek recognition from the international community as the legitimate alternative to the Lukashenko regime.

15. (C) According to Rynkevich, Kozulin would prefer a more ambitious shadow government, what he calls a "people's government," that would also include members of the 13th Supreme Soviet, as well as the Belarusian diaspora, and would directly challenge Lukashenko's constitutional authority (Note: Lukashenko disbanded the 13th Supreme Soviet, the country's last freely-elected parliament, after Belarus' bogus 1996 constitutional referendum. End note.) However,

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Kozulin regards his proposal for a smaller, more modest shadow government as a necessary concession to elicit the participation of Milinkevich and other major opposition leaders who regard Kozulin's broader desiderata as "too radical."

Kozulin Criticizes Milinkevich's "Non-Party Movement"

16. (C) Despite Kozulin's support for Vyachorka's compromise on the leadership issue, Kozulin remains opposed to electing Milinkevich as the sole opposition plenipotentiary. Noting that no totalitarian government in recent history has ceded power to an opposition leader not backed by an opposition party, Rynkevich argued that Milinkevich made his first serious mistake by investing his post-election political capital in his non-party "For Freedom" civil society movement that has done little since its creation in mid-2006. Rynkevich attributed the movement's shortcomings to a lack of organizational structure and member enthusiasm that only political parties can generate. Accordingly, Rynkevich predicted that "For Freedom" turnout during the upcoming March 25 opposition demonstrations would fall significantly short of Milinkevich's projections (ref B).

...And His Misunderstanding of Geo-Politics

17. (C) Rynkevich also criticized Milinkevich for failing to appreciate Russia's interests in Belarus prior to the recent energy conflict with Gazprom (ref C). Kozulin maintains that any realistic plan for democratizing Belarus must address Russian interests and recognize that only the United States has the moral and political will to mediate with Russia. Rynkevich added that the United States had proved its strength by raising the plight of Kozulin and other Belarusian political prisoners at the UN Security Council (UNSC) on December 13, 2006.

Kozulin's Condition and Gratitude to United States

¶8. (C) When Ambassador inquired about Kozulin's health, Rynkevich replied that Kozulin was recovering slowly since he had been very close to death just before ending his 53-day hunger strike (ref D). He then reminded Ambassador of the letter from Kozulin's wife, in which she credited the U.S. effort in the UNSC with saving her husband's life by enabling him to end his fast (ref E). As the meeting concluded, Rynkevich expressed to Ambassador the Kozulins' most heartfelt gratitude to the U.S. government and the American people.

Comment

¶9. (C) If Rynkevich presented us with an accurate picture of Kozulin's views, the imprisoned opposition leader (and his faithful attorney) demonstrate a keen understanding of the challenges facing the opposition and viable solutions to overcoming them. Kozulin's receptiveness to Milinkevich's participation in the congress and to Vyachorka's compromise proposal is surprising and encouraging.

¶10. (C) While Rynkevich went to great lengths to promote Kozulin's perspective, Rynkevich proved to be an intelligent, thoughtful, articulate, and therefore impressive figure in his own right. We concluded the meeting thinking, "if only this guy were catapulted to a senior leadership position in the opposition coalition."

¶11. (C) Biographical note: Rynkevich has acted as Kozulin's primary spokesman on political issues since Kozulin ended his 53-day hunger strike in December 2006. Formerly an attorney for the Belarusian Association of Journalists, he is also Co-Chair of the "Freedom to Kozulin" Committee and was recently nominated by Kozulin to become Belarusian Social Democratic Party "Gramada" Deputy Chair. In partnership with prominent human rights defenders Igor Lednik and Vyacheslav Sivchik, Rynkevich is currently working on a strategy to advance the goal of eventual Belarusian membership in the European Union.

Stewart